Energy Independent Communities Grant Program Overview

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Introduction:
Energy Independent Communities Grant Program

Grantee Program Background

In January 2009, Governor Doyle awarded 10 energy independence grants to 23 Wisconsin communities. The grants were used by the participating communities to prepare energy independence plans focused on energy and fuel usage in municipal buildings and fleets. The goal of the planning process was to identify projects and implementation strategies needed to achieve the Governor's goal of generating 25 percent of the State's electricity and transportation fuel from renewable energy resources by the year 2025.

Concurrently with the grantees' planning process, the Wisconsin Local Government Institute (LGI) monitored communities' progress and collected data from participants via surveys, an online collaborative group, and quarterly meetings. The goal of LGI was to identify lessons learned, common challenges, and barriers to creating effective and implementable energy independence plans. The fruits of the LGI review are contained in this document.

Evaluating the Energy Independent Communities Planning Grant Program

The Wisconsin Office of Energy Independence invested $500,000 in the energy independence planning grant program in 2009 and is providing the same grant opportunities in 2010. In the hopes of continuing to refine the energy independent planning process, this document provides an overview of the 2009 Energy Independent Communities (EIC) grant process and identifies lessons learned and recommendations which could be helpful to future communities. To facilitate the evaluation of the grantee program, this document is broken into three primary sections.

Section One: Grantee Community Characteristics:
The first section provides an overview of all the participating communities. The important aspect of this section will be a discussion about the characteristics of the grantee communities and whether their make-up is representative of all Wisconsin units of government. The grantee communities' similarity to other Wisconsin units of government will dictate how readily the findings from this study can be applied to future energy independent communities.

Section Two: EIC Planning Process and Common Issues:
The grantee communities were required to follow a prescribed planning process that was segmented into four three-month quarters. LGI monitored progress and gathered feedback during each of the quarters. The second section will provide a brief overview of each quarter and highlight any experiences that were common across multiple grantee communities. As part of the process, LGI also conducted a survey of every local government unit in the State. The results of those surveys will be used to determine if the common experiences are applicable to other units of government.

Section Three: Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Improving the EIC Grant Program:
The third section synthesizes all of the information gathered during the evaluation process and presents strategies for future communities based on the lessons learned by the inaugural

grantee communities. In addition, this section provides recommendations based on LGI's findings for improving the EIC grant program.

Although this document is focused on the evaluation of the grant program, the following section provides a brief overview of the importance of energy independence planning and its potential impacts. Understanding the value of energy independence planning will be crucial to developing widespread community support and participation.

Importance of Energy Independence Planning

The investment in energy independence planning and projects can be leveraged to generate significant local and state economic impacts. Although those impacts will be varied and somewhat determined by the type and scale of investment, the following examples provide an overview of the significant potential.

Reliance on Foreign Energy Sources: As energy demands grow and fuel prices increase, a significant amount of government spending is going toward the purchase of fuel sources that are largely produced outside of Wisconsin. As a result, that portion of government spending is not helping to create local jobs or economic growth. The Governor's 25x25 plan and energy independence planning provides the opportunity to capture energy spending locally and help drive the Wisconsin economy.

Assessing Investment Alternatives: The pursuit of renewable fuels and energy efficiency will require capital investment by local units of government. By engaging in an energy independent planning process, government officials will have the data necessary to make informed decisions about project costs and return on investment.

Public Education: Engaging the public in the energy independent planning process will educate people on the impacts of energy efficiency and renewable resources, and will help foster public support.

Long-Term Community & Economic Development Planning: The issues addressed in the energy independent planning process are relevant to many other community planning issues. By making the results of the planning process available to other initiatives, future community plans and economic development strategies can tailor their efforts toward achieving the 25x25 strategy.

Assess Progress Towards Goals: As energy efficiency and renewable projects move forward, units of government will need baseline data with which to track their progress. The energy independent planning process provides the opportunity to develop that data.

Although all of the advantages of energy independent planning listed above are important incentives for engaging in the process, the most tangible benefit will be the creation of jobs and economic growth resulting from increased spending on State produced fuel sources. The following list summarize and quantifies some potential impacts of investment in renewable energies:

- In 2007 Wisconsin energy users spent $21.6 billion on energy consumption. If, as a result of meeting the Governor's 25x25 initiative, 25 percent of those purchases shift to locally produced renewable energy sources, there would be $5.4 billion of new money entering the state economy.

- The Wisconsin Office of Energy Independence has the goal of capturing 10 percent of the growing bio-industry and renewable energy market by 2030. According to a national leader in economic research, the nation as a whole is projected to see 3.4 million new "green" jobs by 2038[1]. If successful in capturing 10 percent of that growing market, Wisconsin could see 340,000 new jobs. In order to capture those new jobs, local units of government must be planning for the development of renewable energies and energy conservation.

- Many of the new "green" jobs will be in important existing industry sectors. For example, sheet metal workers are needed for wind turbine production; roofers, contractors, etc. will undertake efficiency upgrades. Because these industries have long been important to the Wisconsin economy, investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency can help boost key sectors that have ripple effects through the rest of the State's economy[2].

Meeting the goal of 25% renewable energy by 2025 would be the equivalent of injecting $5.4 billion into Wisconsin's economy.

- If municipal governments and regions do not invest in renewable energy, they will eventually have to invest more money in traditional fossil fuel plants. Research has shown that investment in clean-energy technologies generates about three times more jobs than investment in fossil fuel technologies[2].

As local governments consider preparing an energy independence plan, it is important to understand how the potential economic impacts could occur. The result of investment in renewable resources will be three tiers of impacts that ripple through the local and regional economy. Those tiers are defined as direct, indirect and induced impacts:

1) *Direct Impact:* The direct impact of investment in renewable energies are jobs and output created by the new energy production. For example, if a new bio-fuel plant is constructed with 50 employees, the direct impact is the creation of those 50 jobs.
2) *Indirect Impact:* The new facility will then have to purchase materials and supplies from other local businesses resulting in more money circulating through the economy and more jobs. For example, the bio-fuel facility will purchase its fuel source from local farmers resulting in an indirect impact on the agricultural industry.
3) Induced Impact: All employees needed to fill the new jobs created by the direct and indirect impacts will spend money at local establishments (grocery, auto-repair, etc.). That spending represents induced impact.

In order to capture the positive impacts of renewable energies and energy efficiency investments, local units of government will have to prepare energy independence plans to guide those investments. This document provides insight into the planning process and provides suggestions that can help communities that are considering preparing energy independence plans.

1) *IHS Global Insight. US Metro Economies: Current and Potential Green Jobs in the US Economy. October 2008*
2) *Center on Wisconsin Strategy. Greening Wisconsin's Workforce—Training Recovery, and the Clean Energy Economy. April 2009*

Section One:
Grantee Community Characteristics

The energy independence planning grants were provided to 23 communities that, via cooperative arrangements, comprised 10 grantees. The grantees are briefly profiled below:

1. ***Chequamegon Region - Ashland (City & County), Bayfield (City, Town, County); Red Cliff Tribe, Town of La Pointe***
   The largest in terms of land area, the Chequamegon Bay Region is relatively low in population and largely still in natural landscape. The largest community in the region is the City of Ashland with a population of 8,500. The Red Cliff lands cover most of Ashland County and parts of Bayfield County.

2. ***Osceola (Village, School District)***
   The Village of Osceola is located in Polk County, Wisconsin on the banks of the St. Croix River. The Village has a population of approximately 2,800. The Village and the School District had been actively exploring sustainability initiatives, including the Natural Step program, prior to their award of the energy independence planning grant.

3. ***City of Marshfield and The Marshfield Utility***
   The City of Marshfield (population 19,500) is located in north central Wisconsin. Marshfield is part of a larger micropolitan area which also includes the City of Wisconsin Rapids. Because the City is one of the larger population centers in that part of the state, it has numerous amenities that are typical of larger communities. For example, Marshfield is home to St. Joseph's Hospital, which is the second largest hospital in the state by average daily use.

4. ***Brown County and The Oneida Nation of Wisconsin***
   The Brown County, Oneida Nation pairing is the most populous area to receive a grant. Brown County has a population of over 225,000, with the City of Green Bay its largest city at 107,000 residents. Because Brown County has a larger urban core and more suburban development than the other grantees, they must analyze significantly more data, but will also be presented with more opportunities.

5. ***Town of Fairfield (Sauk County)***
   The Town of Fairfield is a rural community of only 1,100 located in Sauk County. The Town is between Baraboo and Portage, Wisconsin, which serve as the closest commercial and employment centers.

6. ***City of Columbus and the Columbus Utility***
   The City of Columbus is located in Columbia County approximately 30 minutes northeast of Madison. The City has a population of almost 5,000.

7. ***City of Oconomowoc and the Oconomowoc Utility***
   With a population of 14,000, the City of Oconomowoc is the largest single community among the grantees. Oconomowoc is also the only grantee within the Milwaukee Metro Area with an estimated population of about 1.7 million. Because the City's utility provider is affiliated with Wisconsin Public Power Incorporated (WPPI), they are also part of the planning team.

8. ***Spring Green (Village, Town, School District)***
   The Spring Green group is comprised of the Village, Town and School District and is located in southern Sauk County just west of Dane County. The Village and Town have small populations, 1,500 and 1,800 respectively, but the area is a popular tourist attraction because of the American Players Theater and Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin.

9. ***City of Platteville and City of Lancaster***
   Platteville and Lancaster are both located in southeast Wisconsin in Grant County. The two cities are approximately 16 miles apart and have populations of 10,200 and 4,000 respectively. Platteville is unique in that it is first and foremost a college town. The City is home to the University of Wisconsin-Platteville which has a student enrollment of more than 7,000. Platteville was able to leverage its relationship with the University for technical assistance during the planning process.

10. ***Village Evansville and the Evansville Utility***
    Evansville is located in Rock County south of the Madison metropolitan area and west of the Beloit/Janesville metro area. The Village has a population of approximately 5,000.

How Representative are the Grantee Communities?

The results of the program evaluation will be used to help inform future grant programs and provide insight into energy independence planning. Because the goal of this document is to assist communities in creating successful plans, it is important to understand how representative the grantee communities are of the wide range of Wisconsin local government units.

There were 21 units of government (and two utilities) represented by the 10 grant recipients:

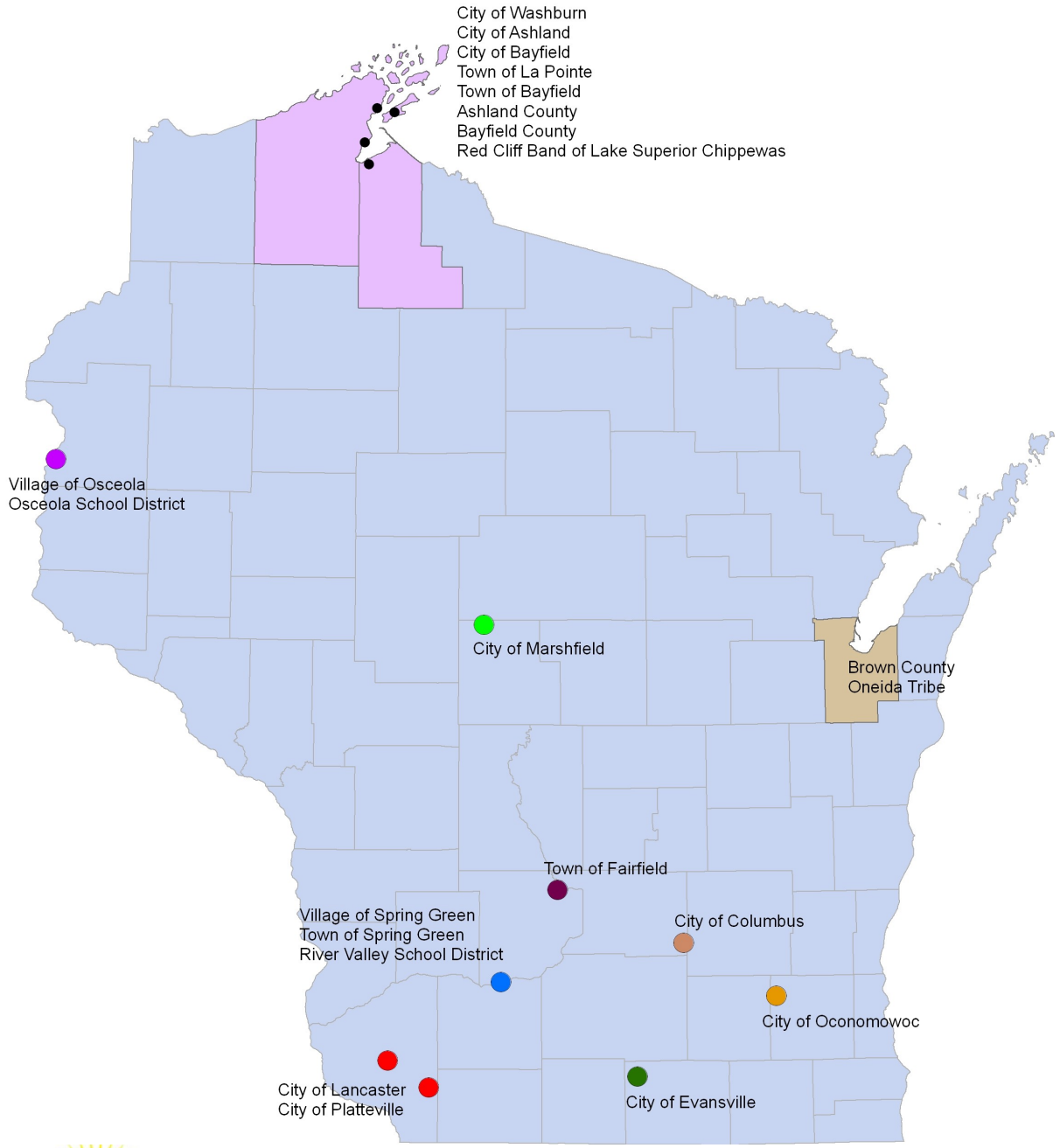
- Cities - 7
- Villages - 3
- Counties - 3
- Towns - 3
- School District - 3
- Indian Nations - 2

The distribution of types of local governments included in the grantees does not reflect the actual distribution across the state where there are far more towns than any other form of government.

The distribution of types of local governments included in the grantees does not reflect the actual distribution across the state where there are far more towns than any other form of government. However, given the time, effort and personnel resources needed to participate in the program, it is not surprising that there were more cities than any other type of government. That being said, the program did an excellent job of including multiple representatives from all the different types of local governments allowing the lessons learned from this process to be applied to almost all types of Wisconsin government.

The one gap in the profile of participants is a representation from southeast Wisconsin. Although the City of Oconomowoc is a part of the Milwaukee Metro Area, it is located on the very western edge of the metro and is outside the contiguous urban environment. It may be helpful to include a community more in the heart of the Milwaukee Metro Area in order to see what types of issues arise when communities must consider all of the variables that come along with being completely within a fully developed area.

Map 1 - Energy Independent Grantee Communities



Section Two:
The EIC Planning Process Overview and Common Issues

On January 14, 2008, Governor Doyle announced the distribution of $400,000 to 21 units of government and two utilities which made up ten grantees (see Section One). The grant dictated a 12 month planning process that was segmented into four specific quarters of activity. The predetermined phases of the project which helped guide the grantees through the process were:

1. *Quarter One*: Community Preparation, Data Collection and Analysis
2. *Quarter Two*: Identification of Opportunities and Strategies
3. *Quarter Three:* Evaluation and Selection of Strategies
4. *Quarter Four:* Plan Implementation

During each phase the Local Government Institute monitored the grantee's progress and gathered information on common issues, challenges and opportunities. This section provides a brief overview of both the grantee and LGI activities during each quarter, and presents the primary findings which arose during the process.

Quarter One: Community Preparation, Data Collection and Analysis

Overview

The first quarter began with grantee communities preparing work plans that outlined their energy independence planning process. With those plans in place, the grantees first task was to collect energy use data for municipal buildings and fleet vehicles and input that information into a standard template. The data was then sent to the Energy Center of Wisconsin for analysis. Although this was the intended timeline, many communities did not complete work plans until near the end of the first quarter, and data collection took much longer than the three months originally scheduled. During Quarter One, grantees also developed a list of 10 initial energy independence priorities that identified potential conservation projects and possible opportunities for renewable energy.

Team leaders describe their progress and challenges during the first quarter meeting at the Midwest Renewable Energy Fair in Milwaukee.

At the beginning of the first quarter, the Local Government Institute prepared and distributed a pre-planning process survey. The survey addressed anticipated grantee goals, obstacles, data needs and expectations. The purpose of the survey was to gather baseline information that could then be compared to insights offered by the grantees as the process progressed. The survey revealed some common insights into community goals and expectations which could roughly be segmented into two categories - expectations and obstacles.

Survey Summary

Expectations:

- When asked what community goals were behind their desire to be part of the planning grant process, most communities identified the need to reduce fossil fuel usage, increase building energy efficiency and raise public awareness of energy independence.
- Similarly, when grantees were asked about expected benefits of the planning process The most common results involved reduced energy usage, increased knowledge and acceptance of energy planning by officials and residents, better monitoring of energy consumption, and saving of taxpayer dollars.
- Lastly, grantees were asked what they expected in terms of outcome from the grant process. The answers were wide ranging but often included:
    - Energy Evaluation, Audit and Modeling Capability
    - Financial Analysis Skills
    - Ability to Identify Community Strengths, Needs and Priorities
    - Implementation Plans
    - Identification of Partners and Opportunities for Collaboration

Roundtable discussion between team leaders helped pilot communities learn from one another at the first quarter meeting in Milwaukee.

Obstacles:

- Grantees were asked what they thought the biggest obstacles would be when planning for energy independence. The results commonly included the challenge of funding for implementation, dealing with data, staff resources and collaboration with partners and stakeholders.
- Likewise, when asked in what ways they felt ill-prepared for the planning process, the three most common responses dealt with a lack of in-house expertise, ability to collect and analyze data, and the need to communicate with state and local partners.

Primary Findings

At the end of the first quarter, LGI organized a quarterly meeting where grantees were asked to discuss their progress to that point and identify their specific challenges. The information presented at the quarterly meeting highlighted three common challenges that also echoed the obstacles predicted by the survey.

1. The grantees felt their ability to distill information and make informed decisions was hampered by the short timeframe and limited staff resources. This may have been one of the reasons that data collection and analysis was still occurring well after the completion of Quarter One.

2. Because many grantees were involved in a joint effort, a common challenge was successfully incorporating all stakeholders into the process, and managing their diverse interests.
3. Not surprisingly, communities were already thinking about how to fund projects that resulted from the planning process. Many communities mentioned that the identification of funding sources was a challenging task.

Accounting for 90 percent of total survey responses regarding obstacles to energy planning, the three most common were funding (37%), staff time and resources (31%), and technical expertise (22%).

Although this information was provided only months after the process started, it became clear as the project progressed that even at this early stage the grantees were beginning to identify common challenges that would extend across the entire year of planning.

Potential Implications for other Local Governments

In addition to the surveys of grantee communities, LGI also conducted one survey of all 3,059 local units of government. The results, which are found in full in the Appendix, were used to determine whether all units of government are likely to face the same challenges as the grantee communities.

As part of the survey to all local units of government, respondents were asked three questions that dealt with challenges and barriers to the energy independence planning process. The results showed that 86 percent of respondents said they did not possess the staff resources and expertise necessary to complete an energy independence plan. When asked if they knew where to find the resources in the absence of in-house expertise, 64 percent of respondents said they did not. Lastly, respondents were asked to identify the biggest anticipated obstacles to energy planning if they were to start a planning process in the near future. Accounting for 90 percent of total responses, the three most common were funding (37%), staff time and resources (31%), and technical expertise (22%).

Early analysis of the planning process revealed that the resources and skills needed to effectively gather and analyze data were, and would be, a significant hurdle for any community engaging in energy independence planning.

Quarter Two: Identification of Opportunities & Strategies

UW Stevens Point Interim Chancellor Mark Nook addresses attendees at the second quarter meeting in Stevens Point.

Overview

With the data collected and sent off to Energy Center of Wisconsin for analysis, the grantee communities were given the task of identifying opportunities for energy conservation and renewable energies, as well as developing strategies to capitalize on those opportunities. At the Quarter Two meeting, the grantees discussed their experiences during data collection and revisited their priorities to refine them in light of the information they had gathered during the initial six months. Although the opportunities and strategies were examined internally by the grantee teams, they were never specifically presented. Instead, they were used as underlying support for projected identification and eventual implementation.

Survey Summary

During the second quarter, LGI created and distributed a second survey to the grantee communities. This survey focused on the data collection process and the ongoing refinement of project priorities:

To improve future energy data collection, communities should consider implementing consistent energy tracking across all municipal departments, using a data management tool such as EPA Energy Star Portfolio Manager.

Data Collection

- When asked about hurdles to assembling data, almost all of the responses dealt with access to data and bookkeeping. For example, the most frequently mentioned hurdle was that individual data (buildings, fleets, etc.) is fragmented across departments making aggregation difficult. Likewise, many communities were unable to find historic records, and consistency in reporting was lacking.
- Most communities found that their local utilities were a great resource and a willing participant. **During the first six months, it became apparent that the local government's relationship with the utility impacts the ease of data gathering.** Particularly, communities with a municipal-owned utility had the most successful interaction, followed closely by communities that were served by a single provider. Some grantees that had multiple service providers had difficulty gathering comparable data.
- Despite the common challenges, most of the grantees stated that they would not change their data collection strategy in light of what they learned during the process.

Data Impacts on Priorities

- Almost all of the communities reported that the data collection did not cause them to change their priorities, but instead the priorities became more refined through the identification of priority buildings, large energy users and reduction potential.

- The majority of grantees responded that their primary criteria for identifying priorities were cost versus payback, total project impact and job creation/economic development impact.

Primary Findings

Based on the survey results and the Quarter Two meeting, the following themes arose as both common among grantee communities and important to the planning process.

- A community's relationship with electric and natural gas providers seems to have a significant impact on the quality of data and the east of collection. For collaborative teams of more rural communities, this problem may be exacerbated because there are often numerous small utility providers and cooperatives. This may point to a need to engage local utilities in data collection prior to beginning an energy independence plan in order to have access to consistent data in the future.
- In communities where multiple departments manage their own energy expenditures, there is often difficulty in gathering consistent information, particularly in terms of fleet fuel usage. To improve future energy collection, communities should consider implementing consistent energy data recording across all municipal departments, such as EPA Energy Star Portfolio Manager.
- Many communities have not been looking at energy expenses from the perspective of managing costs. Instead, energy bills are viewed no differently than other monthly expenditures, with no effort given to analyzing trends or opportunities for potential savings.
- Many communities discovered they had gaps in historic data that made analysis difficult. Their uncertainty on how to proceed in those situations complicated the data collection process.
- Most grantee communities reported that they had not been collecting energy data prior to the grant planning process. As a result, all of the issues involving data access, consistency and completeness had to be addressed during the gathering phase. Communities planning to engage in a planning process would likely benefit from a dedicated gathering phase prior to the start of energy planning.

Second quarter meeting participants hear UW Stevens Point College of Natural Resources Dean Christine Thomas discuss UWSP's programming to support renewable energy.

Potential Implications for other Local Governments

The survey of all Wisconsin local governments revealed that 60 percent of respondents do not currently collect or analyze any energy data, and only 26 percent collect both fleet vehicle and building energy information. This suggests that most communities will encounter the same challenges in data collection as the grantees did when they started their process. However, without the resources provided to the grantees as part of the program, other communities could have more difficulty in overcoming some of the challenges because of lack of expertise and staff resources.

Quarter Three: Evaluation & Selection of Strategies

Overview
The third quarter signaled a shift from data gathering and general prioritization to the identification of specific projects that could help the grantees achieve their goal of 25x25. At the Quarter Three meeting, the communities presented their intended project targets and discussed the challenges and opportunities in developing energy efficiency and renewable fuel policies. There was no survey of grantee communities conducted during Quarter Three.

Primary Findings
The information gleaned from this quarter comes primarily from the detailed presentations and discussions of the grantee communities at the third quarter meeting. The findings can be broken into three sections:

Project Identification

- By far the most common projects targeted by the grantee communities were energy efficiency projects (weatherization, LED street lights, retrofits, etc.). This is no doubt because energy efficiency is the most cost effective way to reach a 25x25 goal. However, efficiency upgrades alone will not allow communities to reach their goal.
- In terms of renewable energy generation, photovoltaics were the most common project identified. Geothermal and wind turbines were also frequently mentioned.
- Communities also addressed fleet vehicle fuel usage by identifying bio-diesel and hybrid vehicles and potential project targets.

Pilot community team leaders share ideas during a roundtable discussion at the third quarter meeting in Eau Claire.

Project Challenges

- Although all of the grantees were able to identify significant project potential, many of them had a concern about finding funding for such projects. Those concerns did not extend just to capital costs, but staff resources needed for planning and administration were also frequently seen as a significant barriers.
- Some communities reported that it is challenging to get buy-in across department leaders because of a general resistance to change. Because energy planning and implementation must be inclusive of all aspects of local government, this is an obstacle which will be important to overcome.
- It proved difficult for some communities to involve the "right people" from the beginning of the process. Without their involvement, project buy-in becomes more

difficult, e.g., County Executive, Mayor, Pubilc Works Director, large employer.
- It was suggested by a few grantees that, at the beginning of the process, a community should create a project management tool that identifies all key stakeholders and signals when those stakeholders should become involved in the process (e.g., Basecamp, an on-line project management tool, Microsoft Project, or even a basic Gantt Chart).

Project Opportunities

- Many of the grantees reported that they were able to identify "low-hanging fruit" opportunities that they were not previously aware of as part of the project identification process. This reinforces the need to go through a thorough planning process and not just move forward with projects that seem like good options. Without good planning, simple and cost-effective projects may go unnoticed.
- Arguably, the most positive result of the project identification process is that it acts as a community-wide educational campaign. By the end of the process, everyone in the community is better informed about energy efficiency and renewable energies. As a result, community buy-in for projects may be easier.

Potential Implications for other Local Governments

The insights gathered from the grantee communities following the project identification clearly highlight the need to engage in a thorough planning process prior to identifying and implementing strategies and projects. The participating communities identified three primary advantages of the planning process:

1. For a project to be successful, it must engage the right stakeholders. Those stakeholders can be identified and brought into the process during the planning phase.
2. The process itself helps educate the public and generate project support.
3. Through the process of identifying new opportunities, cost effective projects are identified that may otherwise be missed.

Quarter Four: Plan Implementation

The last quarter of the planning process focused on finalizing priority projects and preparing for plan implementation. At the final quarterly meeting, the grantee communities made presentations that, among other things, provided an summary of their overall experience, presented their selected projects, and listed remaining emerging independence planning unknowns.

Survey Summary

Prior to the final quarterly meeting, LGI distributed a survey to all of the grantee participants and the program service providers. The survey provided an opportunity for both the communities and the providers to critique the process and offer suggestion for future grant programs.

Grantee Responses:

- Grantees were also asked for suggestions to improve the way organizations involved in the program work together to provide assistance to participants. As would be expected for a pilot program, almost all of the respondents identified a need for clearer expectations and a detailed timeline that includes deadlines for communities and support providers.
- Because the quarterly meetings were a significant part of the process, the participants were asked to rate and provide feedback on the value of the meetings. The most common comment was the need for less formal presentation time on the part of grantees and more group discussion for peer-to-peer interaction.
- When asked what advice they would have for future EI Communities, the grantees provided valuable insights. One respondent suggested that communities get energy bills directly from their utility rather than relying on in-house records. Another community observed that feasible options for renewable energy sources in small communities are limited. Therefore, energy efficiency and conservation must become the top priority.

The most common comment was the need for less formal presentation time on the part of grantees and more group discussion for peer-to-peer interaction.

Primary Findings

The fourth quarter presentations covered both past planning issues and future implementation hurdles. Some of the most interesting findings are summarized below:

Lunch-time presenter Sean Weitner of the Energy Center of Wisconsin presents findings from pilot communities' planning efforts at the fourth quarter meeting in Green Bay.

Surprises:

- Almost all of the grantee communities reported that they were surprised by the amount of energy used and the distribution of energy across buildings. This suggests that most communities have little understanding of their current energy usage. In addition, it provides warning to communities that believe they can target energy conservation measures based on assumptions. Clearly this finding points to the fact that some data analysis is required to target effective energy strategies.
- Many small communities discovered that it is not economically feasible to pursue renewable energy projects because of their size. This highlights the importance of conservation efforts, and the opportunity for intergovernmental cooperation among small units of governments pursuing collaborative renewable energy projects.

- Many communities were stunned by the level of community acceptance and engagement throughout the process. This speaks to the important visibility that the grant process provides.

- Many of the communities said that they are unsure how the changes in renewable energy technology and energy costs (renewable and non-renewable) will impact their future plans. This points to difficulty in determining renewable energy project feasibility, even after a year of planning. This shows a need for greater certainty in the renewable energy markets.
- Not surprisingly, another common unknown is future political and public support for projects as implementation begins.
- Despite the year-long planning process, many communities still are unsure of the feasibility of planned renewable energy projects. **This unknown speaks to the complexity of planning alternative energy projects.**

Future Unknowns

Potential Implications for other Local Governments

The insights gathered from the grantee communities at the end of the project reflect a survey response common to all Wisconsin units of government: The concern over political and public support was widely reported as a significant barrier to completing an energy independence plan.

Section Three:
Lessons Learned & Recommendations

The primary purpose of the Local Government Institute's overview of the energy independent process was to identify lessons that could be applied to communities who undertake an energy planning process in the future. This chapter summarizes the insights gained from the review process as they apply to energy independence planning in general, and to the OEI grant program specifically.

General Energy Independent Planning Lessons

Getting Started Early

The challenges faced by the grantee communities during the planning process revealed that, in an ideal situation, communities participating in an energy independent planning process should engage certain practices prior to the planning efforts for the best results. Specifically, the following lessons came out of the review:

- Involve local utilities in the need for energy data collection before starting the planning process. This will help strengthen the local government's tie to the utility and aid in data collection in the future.
- Centralize energy expenditures within a single governmental department. Frequently, communities found that gathering data was complicated by inconsistencies in record keeping across different departments.
- Collection and analysis of energy data is not only useful during an energy independent planning process, but it is also an effective cost management strategy. Beginning the collection of data and analysis of trends prior to an official planning process will provide immediate benefits as well as ensuring a more streamlined, efficient data gathering process during the planning phase
- Bring local government leaders into the energy conservation and planning process early. By involving all government stakeholder before official decision making begins, the likelihood of buy-in and wide acceptance will be greater.

The Importance of a Thorough Planning Process

The feedback from the grantees made clear the importance of conducting a thorough planning process before critical energy policy decisions are made:

- The process of data analysis revealed many unexpected things about community energy usage in terms of distribution and quantity. The relatively uniform surprise reaction that accompanied this data suggests that, without a thorough planning process, a community's assumptions about energy usage would be incorrect, thus leading to poor decision making.
- Through the planning process, many communities identified "low-hanging fruit" that offered short-term cost effective conservation options. These opportunities may have been missed without the planning process.
- Community support is critical for the long-term success of energy independent strategies. An involved planning process offers the opportunity to provide exposure to the community and foster buy-in.

The Importance of Cooperation

Many of the barriers identified by smaller communities could be mitigated through intergovernmental cooperation. Specifically, collaborative planning and implementation efforts could increase staff capacity for data collection, provide a more unified approach to working with local utilities, and increase the feasibility of capital intensive projects through the pooling of resources. The following are suggested strategies for improving the likelihood of a successful and fruitful collaboration:

- When developing cooperative relationships ensure that the collaboration enhances planning capabilities. In other words, look for opportunities that can supplement local skills and increase human resources.
- Frame the goals and objectives of the planning process regionally. All members of a cooperative relationship must feel that their issues are central to the planning process. Addressing issues at a larger scale will help improve buy-in.
- To foster political and public support for collaborative efforts, demonstrate that the relationship will offer clear fiscal benefits to all the parties.
- Build trust between the collaborating partners by creating a formal agreement that specifies the role each party will have. This will help clearly establish expectations.
- Tackle smaller issues, such as standardizing data information, before beginning a rigorous planning process. This will ensure that a working relationship is developed before the complex planning process begins.

Energy Independent Grant Program Lessons

The evaluation process also helped identify some opportunities for improvement of the grant process itself. The key suggestions are summarized below:

- At the outset of the grant process, clearly delineate support service roles and articulate expectations of the grantees and the support staff. Similarly, create a timeline that identifies deadlines for community activities (e.g. data gathering) and support partner responsibilities.
- Require the grantee communities to develop and submit a project management tool (e.g. Gantt chart) and work plans early in the first quarter.
- Reduce the amount of formal presentations and sharing time at the quarterly meetings and encourage more networking and problem solving among the grantee communities.

2009 Energy Independent Communities Pilot Planning Grant team leaders pose for a group photo at the fourth quarter meeting in Green Bay. Left to right front row: Marty Anderson - Marshfield, Sandy Decker - Evansville, Nancy Osterhaus - Columbus, Linda Donnelly - Spring Green, Kelly Westlund - Chequamegon Bay, Lisa Geason Bauer - Oconomowoc, Dennis Bednarski - Oconomowoc. Left to righ back row: Brian Driscoll - Office of Energy Independence, Jerry Wehrle - Lancaster, Tim Stone - Town of Fairfield, Bob Kazmierski - Osceola, Larry McDonald - Bayfield/Chequamegon Bay, Bill Dowell - Brown County, Timm Johnson - Osceola, Steve Sobiek - Columbus, Bob Duffy - Oconomowoc, Jerry Braatz - Oconomowoc, Steven Crane - Lancaster